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The flight of the Gwala-Gwala bird: ethnicity, populism and worker culture in Natal's labour movement

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last few years Natal has emerged as the cradle of a robust cultural movement within democratic labour organizations. In all major industrial centres black workers are asserting their creative powers whilst demanding at the same time control over them; "We have been singing, parading, boxing, acting and writing", asserts a 1985 document of the Workers' Cultural Local, Durban, "within a system we did not control." So far, black workers have been feeding all their creativity into a culture machine to make profit for others... This makes us say that it is time to begin controlling our creativity: we must create a space in our struggle - through our own songs, our own slogans, our own artwork, our own plays and dances ... We must conquer:yes. But our struggle is not there only to destroy institutions of oppression. It is there to build new ones embodying our principles of democracy, of unity and of our new world".(1) The trade unions, sceptical at first, of this newly-found zest, are beginning to place such work on their agendas very seriously; new institutions are emerging: cultural locals, joint worker-community and youth projects;

izimbongi are pacing up and down orating their 'words of fire' in mass gatherings. From Richards Bay to Ladysmith in the North, from Howick to Durban and as far south as Port Shepstone, a multi-faceted cultural contribution is growing. One of the izimbongi has praised the workers' movement as a 'moving black forest of Africa'(2) - the cultural energy he and others are harnessing resembles the forests' gwala-gwala bird: flying low to perch from tree to tree displaying its stark and primary colours. In Natal it is impossible to imagine the bird's flight without the forest, their task has been in return, to make it impossible to imagine any such forest without the bird. But, in these times of the felling of trees and the hunting of creatures, this paper is a cautious asessment of such flights and the struggles they embody.

More specifically, in this paper I intend to do two things: explain to a broader community why such a movement at this stage is unique to Natal and

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THE FLIGHT OF THE GWALA-GWALA BIRD:

ETHNICITY, POPULISM AND WORKER CULTURE IN NATAL'S LABOUR MOVEMENT.

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what are the mechanisms that sustain it. Furthermore, rekindle some of the sparks in the debate on black working class culture in South Africa which started raging over the pages of the South African Labour Bulletin last year and continues in other guises in other journals. The former is straightforward and arises from my experiences as a 'participant observer' in the movement, the latter shall take us through a more tortured route in order to define our terms, and their importance, better. Crucial in this case is our understanding of concepts like 'working class culture', 'ideology', 'populism' and 'nationalism'. Starting from the debate we shall be able to focus our optical bicycles better for a ride through the forest.

I. THE DEBATE ON CULTURE

In 1983 at the close of the Dunlop Play's performances I prepared a rough paper which attempted to understand the new dynamics the play had created in working-class life and organisation. (13) I was concerned then to communicate chunks of this experience to others, harbouring a hope that projects of this nature would proliferate. I was in no place to predict or imagine the emergence of so much cultural activity in Natal, rather I was keen to warn the broader community of serious pitfalls. But, I also aimed to create some awareness inside the labour movement of the internal dynamics of such projects. (4) More than most though, I was concerned to curb cavalier treatments that this and other worker plays were beginning to receive on the finger-tips and word-processors of some university intellectuals. I argued that these plays could not so easily be dissolved into a 'proof' or a 'demonstration' of one 'paradigm' over another. My plea was for a more adequate theorisation of popular and working-class cultural formations and a better understanding of these plays as 'events' of a peculiar kind in "cultural spaces" occupied by black people in S.A. The argument ran further to state that these cultural formations created their own unique "aesthetics" of performance/umdlala which governed audience expectations and participation; these, carried themselves over into the dynamics of collective play-making through workshop techniques. Then, I pointed out how, the newly

acquired confidence of shop-steward leaderships demanded new representations, of a moral and a performance world despite the 'old' cultural formations' dominance. In pointing to contradictions and tensions governing the creation of these plays I hoped I was demonstrating the ambiguous novelty of the project. To quote, "there is a genuine clash of moral orders taking place", I argued, between workers' attempts to express their khala in the world of production, their strength in organisation, their lives in the townships and, existing popular culture. That this struggle is conducted within and through the aesthetic hegemony of the current forms of culture, creates some of the central contradictions that propels this theatre to creativity". (5)

Kelwyn Sole started the debate on working-class culture rolling through a critical survey of the strands of literature produced out of the initiatives of, and identifications with, three important resistance movements in South Africa: black consciousness, the popular-democratic movement and the democratic trade unions. His central focus was the issue of 'populism' as a "glossing-over" of class realities in South Africa. Indeed, Sole found the worker plays produced in the unions, like "Ilanga Lizophumela Abasibenzi", "Ziyaqika", and "Dunlop Play", as noteworthy examples which marked a 'distinct break with what had gone before'. In contradistinction to the populist effacement of class realities, "the centrality of production and the work process as the principle site of exploitation is acknowledged'. However, he added that, 'it would be mistaken to perceive these plays as unproblematically and spontaneously expressing a working-class culture'. For Sole, working class literature and performance is defined in relation to four factors: author(s), content, audience and 'proletarian world view'. And although most of those criteria are satisfied in the case of the plays, they contained some contradictions and inconsistencies. Nevertheless, "they have allowed a space for working-class expression which has previously hardly existed in our literature and theatre". (6) Contrary to this, Black Consciousness, with its essentially black populist appeals, generated a literature which to its detriment, elided class realities. As a movement, 'emerging among the radical intelligentsia of black universities and theological colleges', (7) it sought a black cultural revival,

a growing black self-awareness and demanded a physical and psychological liberation from white-imposed derogatory images. It saw itself as an unselfconscious spokesman of the black community, and it's identification 'downwards' was to 'patronisingly' politicise the black masses. (8) Similarly, the emergent popular-democratic movement, despite its pregrammatic mentioning of working-class leadership, had generated a new populism, or revived an old one, which merely substituted the word "people" for "black" but was equally guilty of elision: class realities and struggle were subsumed under a broader "culture of resistance". (9)

The Medu Art Ensemble based in Botswana was one grouping singled out by Sole as encompassing the latter kind of populism, based on a popular democratic agenda. Their spirited reply objected to Sole's charge of glossing-over working-class issues, to his definition of working-class culture and argued the integral position working-class culture enjoys within a broader popular culture of resistance. This culture of resistance was cemented through "..a tradition of struggle for a non-racial and democratic society shared by workers, peasants, students suffering under Bantu education, women with broken families facing starvation in the homelands. This long and historic tradition of struggle..lies at the cultural roots of the people of South Africa, workers as well as others". (10) This tradition of resistance is shared amongst many classes of black society because of the commonality of national oppression - "it was born under the heel of influx control, the apartheid laws, the bantustans, the townships. This national oppression and the need to resist has been a basic element of working-class experience since its birth". (11) As this class begins to resist, "as it begins to develop the organizations and institutions of struggle, it must find its own cultural position - remember its history, identify its heroes, write new songs and sing them, start newspapers, literacy circles & discussion groups". (12) They furthermore, find problems with Sole's definition of working-class culture: they note that it is necessary to distinguish between imposed culture forced upon the working-class by the bourgeoisie and a culture of resistance to exploitation and national oppression: "Thus we prefer to define 'working class culture' as cultural activities that build and

direct the workers' awareness in the best interests of the class". (13) It is a direction within the society, within the broader national liberation movement. It becomes essential for them "to create institutions and structures that will reinforce and build upon the working-class culture already present within the people's culture." (14) Thus for them, the worker plays and cultural activities are part and parcel of a resistance culture with sturdy roots in popular traditions.

Kelwyn Sole replied a few issues later, in a thoughtful piece, whose range of issues cannot be addressed here, criticising again populist language which does not refer to class: 'When (they) say, for example, "we talk about building a 'culture of liberation' out of the 'culture of the oppressed' and the 'people's struggle', it seems to me indisputable that they are using a cultural definition based on populist language. (15) And he adds that even "if working class forms are appropriated in the cause of the national struggle, this does not necessarily mean that working-class cultural hegemony in the nation itself is ensured... it would be foolish to believe that working-class hegemony can be guaranteed by individuals and political organisations in which the working-class does not have an active leading role, as a type of 'act of faith' by middle class activists". (16) He then modifies his definition of working-class culture with a quote culled from Burns and van der Will: "By proletarian culture we understand those ways in which the working-class actively and consciously seeks to shape into its own social identity as a class and by doing so, differentiates itself from the values and principles of the dominant class". (17)

One can only feel a sense of deja vu running through the arguments: it is the same kind of acrimony and exchange that has occured in arguments on working-class politics between for example, Foster on the one hand, and, Njikelane, Davies and O'Meara on the other; the same as has occured on the crisis and the politics of transformation, with Erwin on the one hand and Cronin on the other etc. etc. (18) Of course, the nuances of the arguments are different, but they all revolve around the class or non-class basis of populism, the question of tradition and culture. It is a debate that is happening within and outside the labour movement, which

seems persistently irreconcilable: for example, Foster argues that the 1960's and 1970's in South Africa have been radically different in working-class life, denoting a break in the traditions of resistance and demanding new forms of organization, practices and consciousness. For the first time in South Africa, he argued, it was possible to build an autonomous working-class movement devoid of the populism and petty-bourgeois leadership of past struggles to lead society forward. Foster's arguments account for discontinuity in tradition and the novelty of the last decade's struggles.(19) Davies and O'Meara emphasise the continuity of working-class traditions and consciousness. They argue that the "South African proleteriat is not some collective tabula rasa waiting for the correct line to be inscribed on it before it is galvanized into revolutionary action. It contains its own traditions, political culture and consciousness which has to be confronted." They object to Foster's and Fine's attack on 'populism' as a movement generated by petty-bourgeois which subordinated or effaced working-class interests: "Freed of the influence of all petty bourgeois forces this (Foster's) genuine 'proletarian politics' will flow of its own accord. Again, the villain of the piece is the influence of the petty bourgeois. What is not confronted are the real ideologies and political cultures through which the working-class itself was formed in South Africa". (20) Are we in a situation then, where previous generations pass on their heritage of liberation, in Kunene's words saying: "Take these weapons for our children's children/ They are ours ... /May they inherit our dream of the festival/ We who watched the eagle roam over our heads/ We bequeth to you the rays of the morning.."(21) Or, do we see the novelty of South Africa's labour movement: its reliance on new forms of grassroots democracy on the shop floor, the leadership born there, articulate and militant, born in the factories over the last decade of struggles creating a new form of identity amongst working people? Do we say that groups of workers, using all the elements at their disposal, have sculpted and harnessed a fundamental shift in working-class cultures and consciousness? How, 'umsebenzi' 'abasebenzi', 'sebenza' etc. instead of destiny toil, or

to explain leaving behind a plucked bird fit for stewing? the paper on workers' theatre that I wrote three years ago holds very few answers on this broader issue.

The cultural activists of the Workers' Local were asked in 1985 to contribute to the culture debate in the S.A.L.B. and in the interview that ensued they tried to link up with the debate: "There are very strong cultural traditions: we are schooled in them from childhood. But at the same time there is no one tradition, there are many. Of course it (our work) has many political elements from the past. But it also has many new ones. Where it gets its character is quite simple: it starts from our experience and our unity. So it has to draw a line against any exploiter in the factory or the townships; against impimpis; against white and black politicians who betray us; against divisions. It also differs from a lot of black creators who have a patronizing attitude to us: a lot of people with a tickey's worth of education have a superior attitude towards us. They speak a language we don't understand. Our task is to take our rich or poor heritage and make it satisfy working people, their families and any other suffering people in South Africa". The issue of 'many traditions', not one; the issue of 'political elements'; the issue of the starting point of 'our experience and our unity'; of 'drawing-lines' and of 'superior attitudes', however evocative can only be understood if we begin to address squarely the specific dynamics of this cultural movement in Natal. Then and only then can we review the 'culture debate' and whether such analyses explain at all this movement. As mentioned above, the first task, is to explain the mechanism of this 'uniqueness', as a 'participant observer'.

II. THE CENTRALITY OF THE DUNLOP EXPERIENCE

The experience surrounding the Dunlop Play project was important in three respects: firstly, it created a space within the labour movement for

cultural activity over and above union struggles. And, occupying this space was a core of activists committed to cultural work alongside worker organisation, no matter what obstacles were put in their way and no matter what hardships they experienced. Secondly, many of the participants in the play became central shop-stewards and worker leaders in Dunlop, in MAWU and in Natal's trade union life. Thus, a strong affinity between grassroots leaders and cultural activists ensured the continuity of this movement; thirdly, cultural work spread horizontally to other factories in Durban and beyond through 'imitation-effects': other workers, having seen the Dunlop Play started organising their own plays and cultural events independently; sometimes they also solicited the cooperation of the core activists. Without damaging its fragility at this stage, one can safely state that a cultural movement was initiated through these combinations of factors. Before outlining the novelty of this resistance culture, it is necessary to outline with more clarity the above components.

Dunlop's cultural activists have achieved a remarkable status within the movement. They have generated three acting casts, six oral poets, dancers and dancing instructors; photographers, musical composers and an artist. But within this array of talents, four of them in particular have consistently ploughed away dynamizing in the process cultural contributions in the factory, the union and beyond. A potted history might suffice: after the Dunlop Play, many of the participants resolved to start a group within FOSATU to continue with cultural work. As a result, in early 1984, they started meeting at the Gale Street union offices. They began attracting a broader grouping of people from other unions who also arrived with a broad range of expectations and intentions. Despite early enthusiasms and commitment, the group's lack of direction and discipline, this period was marked by many frustrations. Its chaotic existence was compounded by three factors: the FOSATU Regional Education Commitee decided that cultural energies should be put into the Pinetown Local for 1984, where, another vibrant grouping of textile workers were beginning to make their prescence felt through plays and choirwork. Furthermore, Dunlop workers were involved in a

period of acute internal strife over factory leadership and morale. Thirdly, Qabula, a crucial activist, started performances of his oral poetry compositions in union gatherings, and, the enthusiastic response by workers found him spending whatever time he had, travelling from Richard's Bay to Secunda and back, chanting and orating. But stubbornly and erratically work continued from Gale Street, with the grouping being kept together by Nise Malange of the T.G.W.U. and Nafta Matiwane from Dunlop.

From Gale Street they were workshopping a new play on migrant experiences: "Why Lord?" ( ). The play workshops looked as if they were grinding to a halt, had it not been for the Dunlop strike of August and September 1984. From then on, the grouping was reorganised. Qabula, with more time in his hands due to the strike, recruited more activists from Dunlop: they spent the long, emotive days of the strike meetings performing new pieces that they would be working on every afternoon. "Why Lord?" - also found a deadline and an audience. From then on and especially <u>after</u> the workers' victory, remarkable talents emerged from the factory floor: people who had acted in Gibson Kente plays, and in Mabatha (the Zulu version of Macbeth). Finally, following the example of Qabula more <u>izimbongi</u> emerged. These new energies were poured into Gale Street's claustrophobic union offices for further work. By 1985, Mi S'duno Hlashwayo, (ɩ<) one of the <u>izimbongi</u>, joined the group and became another cultural pivot in the area. By 1985 too, Gale Street was a hive of cultural activity. And, for the first time the idea of a Cultural Local emerged to link together cultural activists in the workers' movement. This allowed for the linking of activities in Durban (Gale Street) and Pinetown. By April that year, Hlashwayo was holding fort at Gale Street with rehearsals for a play he had produced, "Usuku"; Malange and Matiwane revived "Why Lord?"; Qabula was working on both projects <u>and</u> with Pinetown-based workers. Malange was out twice a week working with Kwa Mashu-based streetcleaners - migrants from the Transkei, and so on. All energies were focused on Mayday and the Local's cultural contribution to it. Mayday at Curries Fountain Stadium was a dissappointment: it was the first stadium celebration confronting them in their lives,

the plays suffered from bad amplification and save the poets and musical groupings the rest became a cacophony of sound and image. Despite this disappointment work continued with added zest for FOSATU's Education Workshop at Jabulani in Soweto; there were 54 activists working hard for this on a range of projects. Part of this process was the preparation of principles for cultural struggle which Hlatshwayo was to deliver as a keynote speech there.

The document charts out the following: it makes clear that workers unionized each other because of necessity: "We were there - everyday of our lives - in front of our machines, tools and implements; for years we were struggling to survive, to feed the children, earning a wage through our sweat. We realized that we needed each other if we were to improve our lot. We united. We unionized each other. We said: together we could change our situation". But, "we discovered that our fate as workers and our needs as human beings bound us together, but language, cultural chauvinism and divisions tore us apart ... We also discovered (then) that we had to overcome our hatrads from each other ... We are a movement which announces a real democracy on this land - where people like you and me can control for the first time our productive and creative power".(22) The document outlines with powerful imagery the difficulties working people confront in their cultural endeavours and asserts its commitment, quoted above, in the introduction to this paper. It also, outlined how they saw the development of cultural work in the factories, in the locals, in the regions and at national level and how democratic structures could develop to assist this process.

But, the 'optimism epidemic' running through these worker groupings came crushing down with the declaration of a 'state of emergency' and the cancellation of the FOSATU open day in Soweto. They heard the news in Pietermaritzburg on their way to Soweto and since then, things went from bad to worse. An attempt to revive "usuku" succeeded for one performance at Edendale; there was also an attempt to join up forces with CCAWUSA - based cultural activists (involved in their own play about their struggle against Spar management) long before COSATU was formed.

Then, the 'Durban troubles' began in the townships and the bloodshed and violence numbed everybody at first; the conflict between pro- and anti-Inkatha groups entered the cultural locals' terrain and created divisions within existing groups. Gale Street became a place where the central core of activists would meet once a week to exchange news and pass morbid judgements about any future.(28) Some of the cultural activists were caught in viscious cycles of conflict in the townships and the squatter areas of Inanda. Like in the townships the social fabric and dynamic of the Locals was torn to shreds. Those who were left put all their energies for the Cosatu launch at Kings's Park stadium in Durban.

The new impetus for action came from outside the Local and was inaugurated by the Dunlop worker leadership and MAWU (see below). The Local's activists began assisting Sarmcol strikers to develop a play at Howick/Mpophomeni and to assist in the development of a Cultural Wing in the SAWCO (29); they were also asked to help stage a cultural festival/celebration to mark the Dunlop workers' victories and to tighten the bands of cooperation between them and their Sarmcol brothers. Immediately, cultural activity started taking-off again. Before long, the shop-steward council of Durban/Mobeni/Jacobs, the MAWU, the FAWU after consultation with SACCED and the CULTURE AND WORKING LIFE PROJECT took over a factory floor in Clairwood and gave space to the Worker's Cultural Local to develop a trade union and cultural centre there.

The Local after serious discussion agreed and decided to appoint a full-time cultural organiser. Hlatshwayo resigned his job at Dunlop Sports and threw himself into cultural organisation. Once again cultural activity was on the upswing.

By 1986, the Local waw functioning and by May that year despite or because of the COSATU vs UWUSA/Inkatha conflict cultural activity was spreading like wildfire. Yet there were tensions: the Durban-based cultural activists made themselves <u>accountable</u> to the Clairwood shop-steward council, where they were based, but they were <u>available</u>, due to their track-record, to the entire region. Whereas the Clairwood

experience has been both productive and sturdy, activists found themselves in demand everywhere: to organise the Sarmcol workers play (Long March) which, despite its success, exhausted their creative capacity. Requests to perform poured in - especially for the oral poets Qabula and Hlatshwayo - everywhere, from youth meetings, communities to trade union gatherings. Although rapport was established with youth groups who were active in cultural work - in Clermont, Lamontville and Kwa Mashu this relationship remained tenuous as more and more demands were put on them by COSATU affiliates. Before long, the burden of organising the cultural events for Mayday. Yet cultural locals were springing up everywhere - two in Ladysmith, in Hammarsdale, in Howick, Port Shepstone, Pinetown, Newcastle etc. At the same time there were new initiatives from Clairwood - again Dunlop-initiated: Matiwane seeing that the others were up to their last sinew involved in cultural work elsewhere he activated for a major play project at Clairwood on Cato Manor/ M'kumbane (which is underway). Around this, another two smaller plays emerged and the Local finally consolidated its activities. Cultural activists elected a chairperson (Dunlop), two projects activists (Dunlop and Spar), a publicity activist (Clover) and a finance officer (Metal Press) who together with Hlatshwayo are running the Local's affairs. ( )

The development and consolidation of the above, and this is the second component, happened alongside the emergence of a robust, articulate and militant worker leadership in Durban's industrial life. So much so that it was this leadership that twice saved cultural work from collapse and channelled it into more and more complex areas of struggle. The original fraternity between cultural activism and leadership at Dunlop's was preserved throughout the last three years. The latter in turn have been involved in some of the most comprehensive labour initiatives in Natal. Since the Dunlop strike of 1984, the depth of organisation in the factory and the degree of support for the shop-steward leadership has constantly impressed the entire labour

movement.[31] The factory floor initiatives and challenges to management authority, the depth of democratic discussion on the hop floor could fill books of industrial sociology. Furthermore, not a single community or political issue has not been extensively debated: from the crisis in the townships to disinvestment; from the education crisis to Zulu nationalism. Their links with all other Dunlop workers throughout South Africa have been strenghened out of their initiatives and no single action happened without consultation. Their links with all the other large COSATU factories on Sydney road have been explosive - indeed Dunlop started a tradition 'direct action' of street demonstrations over broader issues which invariably linked them to Bakers, to Clover and to Hart Ltd. locally. Now any one of them starts and others follow. They led six stay-aways and were involved in six factory floor demonstations and stoppages in solidarity with other workers throughout South Africa. The list can become endless. The shop-stewards, whose chairman in undoubtedly one of the most skillful and popular worker leaders one could have hoped for, have initiated project after project, campaign after campaign activating all popular energies and in particular their cultural activists. And, in 1985, after the carnage in the townships that pitted worker against worker they decided to increase their campaigns for worker unity. Part of this was a remarkable celebration to mark one year since their victories and also to mark management's concession to their demands during the year. Furthermore, to cement the unity between Dunlop workers and Sarmcol's striking workers. For this they hired Curries Fountain Stadium, they slaughted 12 oxen and provided the beer and refreshments, they invited and paid for all Sarmcol workers and their families and invited all MAWU members for a day to mark this unity. The day, with a crowd of 5-6 000, became a celebration of workers' culture punctuated by political speeches. Their chairman, who was also elected chairman of the shop-stewards' council at Clairwood was crucial too in the establishment of the cultural local. In short, this moving black forest, has been the backdrop for the cultural activists' flights.

Finally, cultural activity has spread by 'imitation'. As worker groupings saw something they appreciated, they would demand the same to happen in their factories and in their unions. Independently, trade union organisers encouraged such activity for educational purposes; from seminars to AGM's cultural events started becoming an integral feature of union life. In many cases, the core which we have been discussing before was called in to assist in their creation. Company sponsed choirs and religious choirs started changing their words, and, more rarely, their tunes to fit into this new dynamism. Grassroots composers started emerging providing new songs. Dance-groups demanded their own space, izimbongi started appearing everywhere; plays started being performed at all times and places (our latest count is 24 such plays in the last three years). After, for example, Phumzile Mabele's play, 'Koze Kuphi Nini' (How long shall we suffer) with the Pinetwon group of textile and metal workers, a mini-boom of textile workers' plays proliferated throughout Natal as far as Mooi River and Ladysmith. Within MAWU, the Sarmcol play "Long March" is creating its own mini-boom ~~etc~~. Suffice is to say that a regional cultural movement is underway with cultural activists now fighting to effectively create some coordination.

What is new and unique in Natal then, is that alongside labour organisation a dynamic straddling worker leadership and cultural activism has been generated and sustains itself outside the dominant institutions of society. It furthermore, embodies the democratic principles of the movement as a whole and struggles on the basis of unity to transform ways of life and cultural practices–to start creating tomorrow, today. There is one more novel factor here: it has created new types of institutions within the labour movement. Hitherto, trade unions have had two prevalent approaches to workers' self-expression: (a) to utilise cultural forms for propaganda or education purposes. Instead of a dry talk on a subject, or publicizing pamphlets, a vibrant presentation of the material enhances the educational goals of a union. Here such work happened

from 'above' e.g. intellectuals in the movement (and without) would dramatise the content, or from 'below' - utilising the people at hand and their own tradition of performance to deliver the same message. (b) noting that there are strong traditions of a performance culture amongst workers to create safety-values for this self-expression within mass-gatherings. This is the "Solly Sachs" or "AWG Champion" approach;[32] the formers' approach to such traditions amongst Afrikaner women in the garment industry, the latters' with Zulu migrant workers, gave their membership a sense of cultural belonging in the union. This, apart from saving the former from the onslaught of Afrikaner nationalism and the latter from conservative ethnic forces trying to undermine the I.C.U., strengthened the union as a vibrant home for more than bread and butter issues. Yet, it left cultural traditions intact. Trade unions in Natal do both: they want cultural work to be a small 'union propaganda machine' and to be a diversion for cultural energies - an "aside" which energises audience attendance in union meetings. The cultural activists of the labour movement are in agreement with both functions of culture but at the same time they have achieved something more: to make cultural work a site of struggle in its own right and to fully put their energies into cultural transformation. A transformation that is necessary, for them, if it is to enrich the moral fabric of the movement.

To illustrate this is to outline some of the opinions of these activists about the 'function' of their work within the labour movement. One cannot fail to note the range of responses it elicited: (a) "..it should embody the principles of our movement in society...for example, it should be non-racial, democratic, and against the discrimination of women.." (b) "It should paint a picture of the real strife, the real dramas that face people. This in South Africa is very political. It should call things by their names". (c) "It should be bigger than politics, it should be about joy, celebration, life. So some of it will not be just union issues or politics. But it should be encouraged." (d) "It

should empower and activate people not to sit down, but it should make people want to participate and do their own cultural work; to change them: from sitting down to stand up and make their own". (e) "It should make people identify with the movement, but like in the imboyi poetry criticise the movement". (f) "It should revitalize Africa's strong cultural roots". (g) "It should organise and fight for the exploited artists. It should fight for venues. It should give artists and communities examples" ... etc. At the base of these statements (which reflect a debate) stand new structures that allow for democratic discussion and a commitment to treat cultural work seriously as a sphere of life that needs to be struggled over.

But the <u>will</u> of cultural activists and shop-steward leadership, the struggles that flow from this 'willingness' however necessary, they can never be a sufficient explanation for the movements' survival and growth. What sustains it also is what has been identified (unfortunately) as 'the customs, habits and rituals of Zulu working people in Natal'.

III. <u>THE PROBLEM OF ZULU ETHNICITY</u>

But, the WCLD also addresses the issue of 'tradition'. In a couple of sentences it states that firstly, there is no <u>one</u> tradition informing their work, but "traditions" socialising people since birth; secondly, that there are many 'political elements' from the past and, thirdly, that there are new ones. The previous section illustrated I hope the <u>novelty</u> of their work. It is the task of this section to address the springboards of their creativity.

The cultural movement draws its sustenance from a range of performance traditions and rituals of mutuality based on cultural practices in black communities. These traditions, sketchily and rather naively outlined

III.THE PROBLEM OF ZULU ETHNICITY

Central to the WCL's life in Durban. is the issue of "traditions" and legacies; it is at the heart of eveyday cultural practices.it enriches and consumes the work,it fascinates but also frustrates the Local's activists. Unfortunately though this issue receives summary treatment in the Local's documents and in its responses to interviewers' questions.The closest to an elaboration occurs when the Local's activists in a very elliptical and brief way state that,firstly,there is no ONE tradition informing their work,but a variety of "traditions" socialising people since birth; secondly,that there are many "political elements" from the past animating these traditions and thirdly,that there are also new developments and departures from such traditions. So far,the pages covered, concentrated on the novelty of the cultural movement in Natal,now it is crucial to address the springboards of the movement's creativity.

The cultural movement amongst workers in Natal draws its sustenance from a range of performance traditions and rituals of mutuality, rooted in the everyday lives of black workers. These traditions,sketchily ,and rather naively outlined in a previous paper (33), have produced a vibrant cultural life in black working-class communities, despite the harsh conditions of life and constraints imposed on workers in Natal. It is a rich ORAL world of song,dance,music and performance. These cultural formations (34) and the practices they generate, present for many people a sizeable problem:they are embedded in ethnic impurity,in "Zulu culture" and its modifications over time. For some, they are a rich manifestation of the vitality of Zulu ethnicity, for others, a negative, "tribalist",or, "traditionalist" phenomenon with serious conservative implications. This world of izikhatamyia choirs,ngoma and gumboot dance-troupes,morality plays and mbaqanga musicians, forms the "raw material" from which the Local's activists draw an unending source of energy and creativity to pour it into new moulds of struggle (35). It becomes necessary then, to walk the tightrope through a jungle of concepts-"populism","nationalism","ethnicity ",tradition','ideology","culture"'-in order to preserve some dignity for this pillar of cultural creation in Natal.Here,the path through this jungle becomes tortuous: the argument has to unfold against the grain of received theories of ideology on the one hand, and, notions of political tradition and identity on the other.

To start then: the feeling of 'nationhood' or ethnicity', the commonality of national sentiments amongst people is experienced (to echo Benedict Anderson) as a "deep horizontal, comradeship," (36). We are aware of the phenomenon: despite actual inequalities,status distinctions,stratification and downright exploitation that might prevail in a society, people experience and articulate sentiments, beliefs,and, act in ways,that reflect such 'comradeships'.These sentiments cut across classes and have no necessary class connotation.

Africanist scholarship has traced adequately the ways in which the early exponents of colonial nationalisms set about mobilising people and constructing national identities. These,"lonely bilingual intelligentsias - unattached to stUrdy local bourgeoisies"(37),created the first waves of protest in the continent. We are aware too that, the movement for African nationalism in South Africa shared similar origins and actions in its plight for incorporation into the political life of the Union of South Africa.(38) We are also aware though that, after the ANC shunned its elitist orientations in the 1940s it revitalised itself: it gained a mass-base in its pursuit of a popular-democratic programme of struggle for the achievement of political rights in the country.(39)Furthermore,the ANC bound together the destinies of black worker and intellectual,professional and trader,etc,in a tradition of resistance against Apartheid.(40)

For the black working population in Natal, the Congress legacy was not extinguished when the ANC was outlawed, when the South African Congress of Trade Unions was dismantled in the 1960s and all opposition to Apartheid repressed.It simply lost its coherence.For the 1960s and a good part of the 1970s it was driven into quiescence by intimidation and fear. But,it remained,nurtured by individuals here,groups there,in the midst of an expanding economy.Some of its symbols,songs and slogans were appropriated by Inkatha from the mid-seventies onwards.Nevertheless, Davies and O'Meara are correct that the local working-class is not some "collective tabula rasa" on whose back are inscribed the insignia of organisation. But, at5 thye same time, we also have to,somehow explain our own nightmares: that, over and above exploitation in the factories and oppression as a black majority ,worker experience adds another complication: at the moment in Natal/Kwazulu there is a sense of belonging amongst black people based on their "Zulu-ness". We all concur on the phenomenon but differ in our explaqnations of how this ethnic ideology has become both dominant and for multitudes of workers compelling.

Whatever this ideology and the people it spins around it share,and the actions that flow from it entail, whatever the status we accord it-whether a Zulu nationalism or ethnicity,tribalism or regional populism-our modern theories tell us that it was "interpellated". In other words, we are ready to accord a peculiar degree of autonomy to ideological discourses so that, those who are FORMED through them, can,despite class or status, share a common identity.

This "interpellation", or the formation of Zulu "subjects" and "identities" has a two-fold springboard of operation (and here I am being sketchy): firstly,"administrative fiat":after the subjugation of the Zulu kingdom, the colonial powers defined both a category and a territory of "Zulu-ness" and squeezed individuals inside them. This also involved individuals, homesteads and chiefdoms which in some cases did not even belong to the Zulu kingdom in pre-colonial times.(41) This policy and practice continued and was perfected throughout last century from

Shepstone to Koornhof.(42)

Secondly, by black petty-bourgeois invention and 'imaginings': since the 1920s and the 1930s urban and rural petty-bourgeoisies,with differing intensities,and responding to,and on the basis of,the abovementioned colonial interpellation, mobilised people in the area as "Zulu" forging in the process those deep and horizontal comradeships of an imagined nation.

For example, Neville Alexander argues eloquently the first case: "in order to justify these policies (of oppression and exploitation over the black majority) the ideology of racism was elaborated,systematised and universalised. They (the people of South Africa) grew up believing that they were "whites","coloureds","africans","indians". Since 1948, they have been encouraged and often forced to think of themselves in even more microscopic terms as "Xhosa","Zulu","Malay","Muslim","Hindu","Griqua","Sotho","Venda",etc." (43) These categories,together with the physical creation of Bantustans allows for the easy flow of thew second abovementioned argument.For example G.Mare has argued that Inkatha's populism is a resonant,ethnic interpellation (using non-class elements) which is articulated by a petty bourgeoisie on the basis of homeland policy and its location within the Kwazulu Bantustan.(44) In short,"Zulu-ness" was extruded through a double-sided historical press-mill: on top-the rulers' ideology,nearer the bottom:black petty bourgeois strivings. As a product: we evidence these days the magnetic pull of a submerged Zulu nation and an ethnic mobilisation-Inkatha- on its basis.

There is much that I share here: of course, in the post-1948 period,with the ripening of homeland policy and with Bantustan creation underway, a physical coherence is given to Zulu imaginings and horizons. This carving out of territories and the creation of homeland structures(e.g. Tribal Authorities) is the backbone of what Mare denotes as Inkatha's populism.(45)Furthermore, Mare goes further to analyse the conditions that create black people's availability to such discourses. What is of worry though is a small point of dissonance that has very serious politico-cultural implications: the wholesale acceptance of theories of ideology which treat subject-formation and popular identities as a resultant of structural 'interpellations'-a course pioneered by Louis Althusser and creatively extended by Ernesto Laclau. These theories,influential as they are,leave little space for active appropriations of tradition by ordinary people, as shall be elaborated below.(46) Shula Marks' recent collection of essays asserts such an appropriation,yet,it is methodologically difficult to see how: her concern with "agency" and ordinary people's stakes in the making of histories leads her to castigate structuralism's elimination of the subjective from history (48) yet she in the same stride uses Laclau, (whose raison d'etre is such an elimination) to explain Zulu-based "ethnic nationalism" in Natal.(49)The following pages are an attempt to redress this small worry,which leads through a

critical asessment of Laclau,Benedict Anderson and ends with a need to overhaul our "press-mill" idea of Zulu-ness.

IV LACLAU, ANDERSON AND CULTURAL FORMATIONS

The quarrel I would have with historical materialsists who adress themselves to the issues of ideology and phenomena like populism or non-class comradeships, especially influenced by Laclau or Benedict Anderson are three-fold: firstly,we have learnt, the hard way, to separate 'subject-formation' from ideological interpellations; the implication of this is that ordinary people can, through their own institutions(whether they manifest 'adjustments' or 'resistance' to the 'system') regulate "subject-formation" DESPITE dominant ideologies. Structuralist theories, Ernesto Laclau's included, (50) COLLAPSE subject-formation to being no more than the result or the outcome of ideological interpellations; by implicatoion, oppositional cultures are the effects of contradictions in the structures of social formations and cannot be seen to arise from people's attempts to control their conditions of life.

Secondly, we have learnt to resist interpretations of "Zulu-ness" which treat it as a populist experience "interpellated" from 'above' by either dominant ideologies and/or petty bourgeois imaginings. Rather, we see, "Zulu-ness" as a negotiated identity between ordinary people's attempts to create effective and reciprocal social bonds (or functioning cultural formations) out of their social and material conditions of life AND political ideologies that seek to mobilise them in non-class ways. Both the former and the latter set for each other strict limits of operation.

Thirdly, despite the non-class elements utilised, the myth-complexes that are generated, the identities that are produced,the common experiences of a black oppressed majority, the nature of the abovementioned "negotiation" is constrained by class determination. Once these are clarified below the argument here can be released to (a) show in which ways the black working class bears its own traditions, heritage and ideologies,-how in short it is not a 'tabula rasa' and (b),explode the mythology of an all encompassing "Zulu-ness" which verges on becoming an ontological argument in Natal.

Ernesto Laclau offers historical materialists a general theory of ideology and a specific theory of political ideology-viz. populism.(51)In both instances, he attempts to argue a "non-reductionist" theory of ideology which does not collapse its power to economic interests or class contradictions. (52) Both facets of his argument are important for the discussion of ethnicity or ethnic self-identity in South Africa. His general theory runs as follows: the basic function of ALL ideology (of whatever social stratum or class) is to constitute or

"interpellate" individuals as SUBJECTS. Ideology is, in other words, a DISCOURSE(53) made up of messages,statements, texts,images and sounds which interpellate or constitute us in sets of beliefs, values and norms. As individuals- as these desiring, sexual animals of speech and as these bearers of social structures- we are transformed by ideology into specific SUBJECTS;or, we are "fixed" into particular subjectivities.Furthermore, as social individuals we are the sites for many interpellations which are sometimes coherent but often contradictory. Yet these contradictions emanate OUTSIDE us and DESPITE us: although all social groups and classes are capable of generating ideologies, they are, according to Laclau "constrained" by the dominant contradictions in modes of production and social formations".(54) But, if this is the "function" of all ideology what unifies it into a coherent and systematic DISCOURSE?

For Laclau classes or class contradictions cannot be presupposed as the "unifiers" of ideological discourses, otherwiswe his theory would be REDUCTIONST: rather,the unifietr is that which it constitutes: "the SUBJECT (my emphasis) interpellated and thus constituted through this discourse." (55) So according to Laclau, although all ideology interpellates individuals as subjects, we can differentiate between them through inquiring what KIND of subject is being interpellated. And since this subject is formed through many non-class elements, it is pointless to ask a priori which class interpellates. We can only derive or decipher class hegemony (56) by pinpointing the "articulating principle" that regulates the modalities of this "subject".

Although in principle, the departure from reductionism is welcome,it is important to drive a wedge between ideological interpellation and subject-formation in society: the last decade of struggles within and against institutions in South Africa,from the school to the goverment bureaucracy, from the factory to the church and so on ,have taught us that the"wedge" is a prerequisite for any theory of ideological struggle. After all, all social institutions generate discursive practices or ideologies to the extent that (a) they embody power structures which have their own legitimating 'mythologies',and (b) they attempt to create, construct,inculcate "functional individuals"- i.e. they attempt to create sujectivities (and "attempt" is the big word here) that ensure their long-term reproduction.In this sense, they all"interpellate" individual as subjects,and they all use non-class elements to do so,but can we assume that these interpellations are EFFECTIVE? Within each one, there are no guarantees that subject-formation is interpellated by institutional ideologies. If institutional discourses do not achieve internal coherence,between two institutions contradictory "subject -interpellations" might prevail and so on. The point is that in all these institutions interpellation takes place as an ATTEMPT at forging functional subjects: individuals who perform their lives according to institutional rules and who share the value orientations dominant at any partuicular time. But however much we want to remain "non-reductionist", we have to note that

all institutions embody power relations and as sites of power, they embody *more* than ideological interpellations, they all employ disciplinary techniques and controls over their populations. Although there might not be a NECESSARY class connotation in their ideologies of power, we cannot deny that at the same time class ideologies might proliferate as they are all at close scrutiny, SITES OF STRUGGLE. Nevertheless, the main point here is that there is an attempt at subject-formation, but no institution's interpellation can presuppose assume its success.

Looking at "interpellation" this way preserves Laclau's concern with non-reductionism: there are no prior guarantees that a class ideology is dominant (and what is CRUCIAL, even if it is dominant) there are no guarantees that it is EFFECTIVE. We can only speak of a dominant ideology if, and only if, the legitimating "mythologies" which enshrine power in institutions, and the functional subjects they seek to constuct, are homologous throughout a social formation's IMPORTANT institutions. This presupposes though control of,or hegemony of institutions by power-blocs, strata or classes. If this is the case, we can argue the case for dominant ideology which proliferates throughout the social body. (Feminists for example, would argue that 'patriarchy' is an ideological cornerstone of all social institutions).

But, even if in PRINCIPLE ideology (or -gies) do not have a necessary class connotation, that does not mean that class connotations are always absent: they can even be dominant . (57) Furthermore, a dominant ideology might create functional individuals through force or sanctions, but it does not necessarily form subjects. We can in the same breath argue then, that despite Apartheid ideology, despite the control of most institutions in Natal/Kwazulu of power-blocs that "interpellate" African people as Zulu subjects, there is no guarantee that their interpellation is formative . Far from it, because within such institutions and outside them oppositional cultures are generated, nurtured by ordinary people, as they collectively attempt to control their conditions of life. (*58)

As abovementioned Laclau offers also a theory of political ideology-populism: he argues, consistent with his general theory, that ideological elements taken in isolation have no necessary class connotation. Over and above class contradictions in capitalist society,there is another one of primary importance: this contradiction generates political subjectivities, where individuals are interpellated as parts of the "people" in struggle against power-blocs. He calls this the people-power - bloc contradiction and claims that it is dominant in political life. It generates and unleashes popular-democratic struggles (only overdetermined in the last instance by class contradictions). Therefore, what is identified as populism (these appeals to the people against power-blocks) cannot be reduced to being simply petty-bourgeois ideologies. Rather, they are common to all classes struggling against the powers that be ,and their symbolisms ,and traditions are available to all; their class

nature cannot be presupposed: rather than reducing it to class interests, its 'articulating' principle should be established through an examination of poltical subject-formation that regulates the unity of its discourse. His argument could be seen to be a crucial support for Medu's defence of a popular-democratic tradition common to black workers and other black people in South Africa, with no necessary class connotation, it is problematic. A central problem is its abstract vagueness: authoritarian populisms could be assumed to be involved in popular-DEMOCRATIC struggles; any appeal to the "people" whatever its form against whatever power-bloc could be seen to be of the same social value, and so on. But more importantly, the organisational FORM that underpins 'interpellations' of the 'people' can be elided. As Davies and O'Meara have noted (59) there is a great difference with a populism that EFFACES class contradictions, and "popular-democratic" organisation that insists on class alliances.But furthermore, within the latter historic blocs, there is a great difference between popular-democratic alliances which involve the PRESENCE of the working-class in an organised form as against political fronts which assume the presence of the class in an amorphous way, as part of the "people"-by definition. Each I would argue would generate its own unique interpellations, even when discursive elements involved are irreducible to class.

In short, Laclau's innovation in the theory of ideology (60) despite its impact on historical materialists in south Africa and despite its effects through transmission-belts from the academy to popular organisations has serious implications: it started as an explanation of why working class struggles and ideologies link up with national or populist projects in society which was ,at the time,innovative. But now it has been turned upside down: it provides people with an assumption which, guarantees behind all "non-class interpellations", a class presence (in the final instance, after all, they are all overdetermined by class struggle).If such a presence can be assumed then it matters little what organisational form it takes. His theory, however compelling(61) fails to provide us with the necessary anchors to distinguish between authoritarian forms of populism, democratic class alliances,poor people's movements etc, in whose discourses one can find elements of no necessary class connotation.

Benedict Anderson's book,"Imagined Communities",(62) has created a commesurate excitement among radical scholars for its further contribution in our understanding of politico-cultural subject-formation: his remarkable discussion of the origins of nationalism has opened up a new space for the discussion of contemporary movements and their "imaginings". In the context of Africa and Asia, feelings of national brotherhood and comradeship are shown to be creative constructs and imaginings of "small reefs", of "literate" and "bilingual" intelligentsias (ie intellectuals and professionals). Unlike other national movements they are "unatached to sturdy local bourgeoisies".(63) These oppressed but privilidged petty bourgeoisies crafted the imaginings of submerged and dominated nations to usher a period

of decolonisation onto the historical terrain; nevertheless such imaginings became possible through the development of certain socio-cultural pre-conditions: the rise of print capitalism, the decline of world religious empires and different apprehensions of time; these, created the first models. But in the case of formations dominated by imperial powers, discriminatory practices against these "creole" groups, together with the careless carving of new boundaries for colonial administration completed the backdrop. For example, Tim Couzen's biography of H.I.E Dhlomo and the latter's volume of collected writings capture in an amicable way the emotive depths and imaginative leaps that come to construct a national sentiment.(64) This moving linkage of a people to a history, a territory and a destiny generates deep resonances, strong self-identifications and solidarities which are irreducible to class.

But here like in Laclau's case,Anderson although constantly hinting at popular identifications from "below", mainly concentrates on the imaginings of these tiny literate reefs and the models of nationhood they interpellate from "above". He fails to show HOW these horizontal comradeships articulated by contemporary non-class movements are ABSORBED by the lives and take ROOT in the affairs of those "below". That is, the rise of models odf nationhood and ethnicity initiated by literate leaderships- who imagine the nation and mobilise for its territorial carving- fails to explain one crucial component: the passion for these comradeships of a 'movement', a 'nation' amongst NON- or SEMI- literate multitudes of people. His concentration on scripted signs, ignores that these solidarities are constructed from "sounds": this construction takes place in the public and oral world of mass movements which are dominated by rituals of solidarity embedded in popular cultures and symbolic spectacles of mass power.In short, in the din of this construction we find the performance rituals of solidarity embedded in ordinary people's cultural formations. Any cursory experience of popular gatherings in Natal-from Inkatha's, to COSATU's betrays a tension: there is always a process of "interpellation" descending on the crowds from the platforms like rain, yet, there is also the homology between the rhetoric of grassroots leaders, the izimbongi incantations, the impromptu prayers, the songs and other cultural practices which rise from the crowds upwards to flood the platforms. As J.Cronin states, "the oral arts are alive and struggling for their freedom in South Africa"...in the context of mass meetings. (65) Movements generate collectivities by appropriating this popular culture from "below" and construct identities and solidarities through popular rhythms,sounds and "words of fire". But there are differences in the mode of appropriation between movements which apart from revealing their organisational practices, they can be registered at the level of ideological discourse; and this I contend is a necessary deparure from Laclau's arguments.To make this distinction it is necessary todiscuss sketchily the social role of "mythologies".

"Myths", states V.Turner, "treat of origins but derive from

transitions"...in other words they are narrated in anxious,"liminal" moments, during crucial "rites of passage" in order to preserve and recreate common identities. And he continues: "myths relate how one stae of affairs becomes another; how an unpeopled world becomes populated, how chaos becomes cosmos; how immortals become mortals; how the seasons come to replace a climate without seasons; how the original unity of mankind became a plurality of tribes and creation"(66) and so on.Godelier (67) insists that myths were in pre-class societies what ideology becomes in class society: they legitimate a social order, naturalise its inequal;ities and they mystify the majority by consoling it by effacing or eliminating contradictions.(68).Political mythologies though, emerge in the transitions from clan to class societies and continue thereafter: thus, the 'early' forms of state (69) generate the first political mythologies of "origins", to legitimise the right of rulers to rule, to empower the ruling strata and to simultaneously create collective subjects. Such mythologies are effective if they manage to link proto-communities with shared meanings, rites of passage, forms of symbolism, a sense of a common past with a myth of a FOUNDING community-an origin.

It becomes possible then to register differences between populisms ande popular democratic interpellations (70): the former, appeals tyo black people in South Africa through a political "mythomoteur"- it always, apart fro effacing class contradictions, legitimates its leaders' rights to rule through the establishment of a political mythology of origins. This, furthermore does not challenge existing cultural formations-it rather leaves them intact. For example, Inkatha, whatever its original intentions were (71) legitimates both its leadership style and its popular mission through such a founding mythology: the Shakan revolution which constituted the Zulu nation. All its subjects are available for its call no matter what they do, how they behave and what classes they come from. They were bequeathed to Inkatha to be led forward aqnd chief Gatsha Buthelezi is its natural leader through chiefly LINEAGE.(72)This is over and above the norm, an authoritarian populism. As long as the complex forms of kinship and ritual in ordinary people's cultural formations (rural or urban) find a home in the movement like Inkatha, and in so far as the latter preserves a special place for their ways of life and practices, they are available for ethnic identification; they in turn gain without an effort a political past and a destiny. Such a populism can lose its axiomatic grip if it for instance, bvanned Christian beliefs, or declared education and the scripted sign as a non-Zulu phenomenon,or it abolishede chiefship, or it went around whipping husbands for ruling over their wives and so on; such challenges to existing cultural formations would undfermine it.Because finally, it subsists on the destinies of people carved out as an ethnic space by the Apartheid state, it is also an ethnic movement despite protests from its cxentral committee.

In contradistinction, popular democratic interpellations are incapable of producing such a political founding mythology.

Either they have to resort to an absurd pluralism of many ethnic units with their own political mythologies of origin, each one equal with the other brought together as a multi-ethnic, poly-colour alliance or they have to found their interpellating mechanisms on a moment of general dispossession and on common attempts in struggle to forge a common destiny. The leadership's mandate comes from an actual historical social contract with the people: the first SANC conference, Kliptown 1955 etc, and the relationship between people is a levelling one and a communitarian rhetoric prevails. In this instance appropriations of cultural formations are by necessity transformative. In the first case, like in the case of Inkatha, movements need not engage in struggles on a mass basis against power-blocs; for the latter, common identities can only be formed through common struggles. In the former, political mythologies are crucial, whereas in the latter they are ambiguous. In both, political subjectivities are not interpellated from "above" alone.

Finally, what is the relationship of 'class determination' in this world of non-class interpellations? There is no doubt that those 'interpellations' are shared by more than the black working-class; similarly, there is no doubt that cultural formations are not exclusive to classes; furthermore, that cultural practices are common, without any 'necessary' class contents, how then, do we persist with the issue of class? 'Class determination', your existence in other words as a worker is not only 'definitional', 'theoretical' etc, it sets limits to the ways of life possible and available to people. Workers exist in a world of pressures, that make available some institutions in society but at the same time exclude them from many others. Furthermore, their lives are divided into two neat parts: a world of work in which they are supposed to abdicate their productive power to others and subordinate themselves to the social

and technical dictates of production demands. And a leisure time where they are supposed to regenerate themselves and/or occupy themselves as they wish. In South Africa, the latter is further constrained through racial controls and poor substructures for survival. Your class determination is carried over into your everyday life as 'fate' with unique pressures that provide little space for creativity or cultural practice. In short, you are shaped into a way of life by the virtue of your class location. But workers do not 'adjust' to systems of dominant interpellations, they rather, as I have shown elsewhere react by forming 'defensive combinations' from which spring-up 'proto-communities' or cultural formations. (73) And, within these, the issue of control over conditions of life and subjectiviities is of paramount importance. It is on the basis of these that cultural practices proliferate which generate both adjustments to dominant interpellations and resistance. In Natal, these cultural formations have generated a very vibrant tradition of practices and performances primarily oral which cannot be seen simply as an imposed culture of adjustment.

Black workers we have interviewed (74) or the cultural activists we are engaged with, do not perceive the category "Zulu" as an invention of divide-and-rule. Rather, they see it as an outcome of the Shakan revolution which created a kingdom and a powerful state based on the common identity of many clans and chiefships. They all accept its ontological status and derive dignity, pride and coherence out of it. But this does not mean that they all accept Inkatha's definition of it, nor do they attach to it the same social and political significance. At the most general level, all accept that they are "children of the reed", they share similar allegiances to ancestral lines, similarities in custom, familial prohibitions, similar hardships of the healthy functioning of a homestead economy. Even those most distant from such preoccupations, in the shacks of Inanda or the match-boxes of Kwa Mashu can point to a past where such considerations prevailed.

They all understand that there is some "social bond" knotting them together; this they understand as their "Zulu-ness". But there are different modalities of this "Zulu-ness" subsisting on different working-class formations. The following section argues that there is no "Zulu-ness" in common held by all black workers in Natal, despite the fact that most identify themselves as "Zulu". The appropriation of this ethnicity by black workers is related to their forms of proletarianization and their responses to a complex system of exploitation and racial oppression. This will also allow us to address the issues of the "real traditions and ideologies" that make the local proleteriat anything but a 'tabula rasa'. (75)

IV. FOUR TRADITIONS OF RESISTANCE

For the purposes of this paper I shall argue, however sketchily and provisionally, that "Zulu-ness" is by no means a common univocal or unilateral experience in Natal/Kwazulu. I shall do this by selecting four examples of different appropriations of this sense of horizontal comradeship: the black workers of Howick/Mpophomeni; the black workers of the Lower Umfolozi (e.g. Empangeni/Richards Bay); black workers in Durban and finally those on the margins- the Pondo. The choice of this foursome relates to three factors: their utility as contrasts, my knowledge through adjacent projects of their social history and finally, my coming-to-know these area izimbongi whose work has alerted me to the depth of the differences involved.

Black workers from the Howick/Mpophomeni areas and further afield in Lions River and the peri-urban areas that surround them, understand themselves as "Zulu". But this identity with an ethnic concentration of people is defined in terms of linguistic and cultural characteristics. Socio-politically though they see themselves as part of a broader DISPOSESSED African nation. To identify oneself as a political Zulu subject would be for them divisive and would serve no purpose. Although they would have no problem in being characterised as Zulu, they are unavailable to poltical, non-class interpellations on an ethnic basis. For this, they are impervious to Inkatha's mobilising drives despite early membereship of many of them. (76)

What makes them available to imaginings that take them to feel as part of a broader African nation are their concrete experiences of DIsposession: they imagine many proto-communities like theirs, throughout South Africa and they share with them a horizontal sense of soliuarity. In their culktural formations despite similar rituals in everyday life with many other communities in Natal they have no space for political mythologies of common origin. What mekes them different is their specific historical and

they share with them a horizontal sense of solidarity. In their 'cultural formations' there is no space for political mythologies of common origin. What is it then that makes them different?

Here, they share a common history of two major dispossessions: most of them are dispossessed "labour-tenants" from white farms or dispossessed agrarian wage-labourers. Most of them come from agrarian families who were dispossessed once before by white colonists and settlers made into 'labour tenants' on white farms. The area has real linkages with the Bambatha rebellion and the I.C.U. agitation on white farms in the 1920's. But although they are landless, the land question haunts them, concentrated as they are in urban villages to serve the labour needs of Howick, Mooi River and Nottingham Road. Their rituals of mutuality are deeply rooted to an agrarian culture, mediated by Christianity.

As wage labourers, as people churned out of land relations, they were faced with more urban evictions: some of them were relocated three times: from a growing slumyard world of Howick to a township (Zenzele). They were finally removed there to Mpophomeni: in order to make space for expansion of Midmar Dam to serve white agriculture better.

Furthermore, they made themselves available to both labour and political organization since the 1950's: which consolidated their identity of being a dispossed part of an African nation and workers exploited in the factory. Moses Mabheda and Harry Gwala were their organisers then, and managed to link agrarian grievances, like the dipping and culling of cattle, which were affecting 'labour tenants' (which in many cases they were the workers own kin) and industrial issues through trade unionism. They were part and parcel of all the late 1950's campaigns. Their proletarianization, their class determination and their regional dynamics have shaped them

into a unique phenomenon in Natal: the 'land question', 'white domination', 'worker rights' have a unique resonance.

But there are marked differences between them and black workers in Richards Bay/Empangeni areas: they too understand themselves as "Zulu" but their "Zulu-ness" has its own modalities. They understand themselves to be a separate and a distinctive people: they are tied together by a common culture and a prior political community (state) which was destroyed by imperialism; they strongly believe that the Zulu nation with a territory and a government that represents them; their political unity is mediated through chiefs and they are available to Inkatha's non-class interpellation. In fact, the majority of them are members. They join trade unions readily but trade unionism looks after people's necessities at work whereas Inkatha looks after their community needs.

For the majority, disposession has not occured as in the Midlands. Most still enjoy access to land, overcrowded, underdeveloped, but a meaningful component of tehir lives and those of their kin. Chiefship and its relationship to headmen, and headmen's relationship to heads of commoner's homesteads is still a functioning social system with reciprocal expectation.

Their proleterianization has occured slower over time, with migrancy playing a dominant role in the lives of homesteads. A lot of them were cordoned-off for the sugar plantations to work at cutting cane for minimal wages. (24) Others were cordoned-off for the coalmines further inland at Hlohane, Vryheid and Dundee. Both experiences have created an aversion for that kind of work and as places of drudgery they were avoided as far as possible. The centrality of the traditional homestead remained intact. Again their political leadership has been chief-mediated and with tangible common histories surrounding the Royal House, then, and Kwa Zulu

Government, now.

Durban's black working-class, the largest in Natal, has elements of both traditions outlined above amongst its constituents. But, there is another which is unique to it by virtue of its urban and industrial specificities. Many workers' views are that they are a separate and distinct group (from the Amampondo and Indians) and Zulu workers constitute a separate culture. They all agree that this common culture had a political national history which was destroyed by the whites. And many see Inkatha as a cultural movement that revives a pride in the past which is in danger of being destroyed. They are available, but ambiguisly available, for ethnic political mobilisations. They have also had a unique pre-history, adjacent to petty-bourgeoisies - traders and shop-keepers, who in turn clashed with Indian interests over attempted monopolies of racially exclusive markets. (78) Their history of urban existence, controlled by the Durban-system and rigid influx controls, and their history of urbane slum cultures (Cato Manor) of political campaigns (late 50's and early 60's) (79) has not detracted from the Zulu self-perceptions which makes for the kind of tensions I have described elsewhere. ( ) Yet here again, "Zuluness" differs.

Finally, the Amampondo in Durban have had a history of marginalisation by the "Zulu" which spans many years. They see themselves different only in dialect, but feel themselves to be part and parcel of a black working population which includes Zulu. The latter though differentiate themselves culturally: "the Mpondos are different, they are stupid, they are good fighters, they take all the 'shit' jobs". Some, interestingly though, make themselves available to non-class Zulu-based interpellations. For example at Emakehleni, a Zulu revivalist 'church' it is a Mpondo who officiates rites: the church is there because God sent Jesus Christ to show the whites, the correct path for their own people, Ghandi for the Indians and Shaka for the blacks. The church itself is there to put black people back on the right track on Shaka's way. Furthermore, many have joined

Inkatha, perhaps because Inkatha councillors control housing. Nevertheless, the majority has a different relationship to non-class interpellations.

Most of them have homesteads in the Transkei and migrancy is their lot: either they stay in the shackworlds of Inanda or Malakazi, others in rented rooms in the main townships and others in hostels or company compounds. Their history of working in Natal goes back a century: sugarcane workers, where to this day they form the majority in this agrarian labour-force. But, their relationship to their homesteads and the homestead head's relationship to chiefs is different from migrant workers from Northern Zululand. This relationship was severed during the Pondoland rebellion, where chiefs identified themselves with 'betterment' schemes and the Government. Chiefship for most is now an administrative burden "dressed-up" with ritual. One of the main grievances against the Zulu is that they arrogantly refuse to acknowledge that their proto-communities, their rituals etc. are in common. That their lines of descent with the Mkhize's and the Mthetwas's are the same. (Abambo). That Phungulas exist in Zululand and Pondoland etc. That there is pre-Zulu kingdom commonality between the two, etc. etc. That many of the people who discriminate against them were not subjects of the Zulu kingdom anyway etc. etc.

In short, there is no one appropriation of "Zulu-ness", nor is there to swing the argument around, one culture of resistance: there are many.

contemporary predicaments.

CONCLUSION

We can now point to a few preliminary conclusions, by retracing some othe steps taken: if all optical bicycles were focused through the forest, the image of the gwala-gwala bird offers an appropriate metaphor for the cultural movement here. It is made up of a patchwork of bright politico-cultural colours, and not of a uni-dimensional tradition: whether this tradition is imagined to be "Zulu-ness",of tribalism,of a national oppression and so on. It is rather a multi-coloured chequerwork of influences and performance rituals.

Yet Davies and O'Meara are correct too at abroad level of generality: the working-class is not just a "tabula rasa", it is the bearer of (and here is the difference) of many traditions that do not have a necessary class connotation. Their desire to link such traditions with the Congress movement in South Africa is incisive yet, in Natal at least, inadequate. Here, the prowess of the ANC differed from place to place, and area to area. It depended on the nature of mobilisation and the negotiate4d identities between cultural formations among ordinary people and ideological intrerpellations from a militant leadership in the 1950s.

But if Davies' and O'Meara's singular generalisation needs modification ,so does the Medu group's continuity of resistance cultures shared by many classes, strata and groupings of people need modification. What is also of worry, is their understanding of ordinary people's active cultural formations as "imposed" culture, which ignores grassroots creativity and self-determination of people and workers in defending their dignity and controlling their conditions of life.

Which takes us to the plurality and variety and digtnity of ordinary workers' attempts, through cultural formations to overcome the vagaries of the economy's alienating life.These cultural formations, are not simply imposed from above (only), not only adaphtations to domination, but in their collective nature, in their obtuse rejections of individual values and so on have many elements of resistance, and, many elements which can be used as pillars for new kinds of resistance can be built on.

And here, the cultural locals provide for an educational and stimulating experience: the cultural formations of these working-class groups contain in a fragile, pristine form, the desire to transform conditions of life, and to generate the necessary popular symbolism to announce them. Here as the izimbongi of the movement have taught us, the Zulu vernacular is no exception. They have taught us through their orations the undesirability of

a social system based on capitalism,that is INQUBO YOGIMBELAKWESABO, that is stuffing one's own "stomach" careless of other peoplve's hardships. And,UMADLANDAWONYE, a system of socialism, or, a system in which food is shared within a community of concern.

Finally, there is no working-class culture which exists "suis generis", or as a result of structures of relations of production in societies.Rather what exists is a plethora of cultural formations bearing a variety of traditions,operating within strict limits imposed by the class structure of societies. One will have to agree with Sole that conscious attempts by an organised working-class to create a cultural space in society for the exploited must form the substance of any definition of working-class culture. Yet, at the same time he has to concede that this involves the harnessing of and a struggle within existing cultural formations with strong performance rituals, sturdy non-class forms of articulating experiences ,and sometimes strong racial and gender insensitive connotations.

Finally, there is a sense that the metaphor of the gwala-gwala bird might prefigure bad omens: in the older days the gwala-gwala was hunted in the forests, to be plucked and be worn as an ornmament for chiefly celebrations and festivals.It derived its name from its distraught shrieks, as if it lived in mortal fear of its surroundings. It seems that the old practices have also been revived,as cultural activists have been drawn into the terrain of violence and asassination that Natal enjoys.

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2. A.T.Qabula, in IBID.p.9
3. A.Sitas,"Culture and Production: the Contradictions of Working Class Theatre in South Africa" in AFRICA PERSPECTIVE New Series,nos 1&2,1986. The article was written in 1983.
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5. A.Sitas,op.cit.p.93
6. K.Sole, "Black Literature and Performance: Some Notes on Class and Populism", in SALB vol.9 no.8,1984,p.55
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9. IBID,p.57
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13. IBID,p.23
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19. J.Foster,op.cit.p.3 ff
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21. M.Kunene,THE ANCESTORS AND THE SACRED MOUNTAIN,London,1982,p.1
22. Workers' Cultural Local,Durban "Interview:Culture and the Workers' Struggle" in SALB vol.10 no.8,1985,p.72
23. From Interviews for A.Von Kotze's book on the worker theatre movement in Natal-forthcoming.
24. WHY LORD? was first performed at St.Anthony's Hall in Durban during the Dunlop workers' strike
25. cf, my Mi S'dumo Hlatshwayo: A Black Mamba Rising" TRANSFORMATION no.2,1986.
26. WCLD op cit,
27. IBID
28. On this see A.Sitas,"Where Wealth and Power and Blood Reign Worshipped Gods"...in SALB 11 no.4,1986,pp85-121.Also See also, F.Meer (ed) Unrest in Natal, August 1985,Institute for Black Research,Durban,1985.
29. On SAWCO cf SALB vol 11 no.4 1986: "A Place to Work:Sarmcol Worker Coops".17-23, See also SAWCO NEWS,the monthly newspaper by

the cooperatives.
30. The actual structure of the cultural local is accountable in two-ways: to the cultural activists and the shop steward council in the area.
31. On Dunlop, see my,"Accomodation and Resistance ina Large Mass-Producing Rubber Plant in Durban,1940s-1980s", ASSA Conference Paper,1985. Also,Interviews: M.Pillay,S.Mthethwa,I.Ngcobo, B.Mkhungo,(1986). Also A.T.Qabula's,A CRUEL LIFE BEYOND BELIEF, Johannesburg,1988 (forthcoming)
32. On Solly Sachs, cf.J.Lewis,in E.Webster (ed), ESSAYS IN SOUTH AFRICAN LABOUR HISTORY, Johannesburg,1978. Also E.Brink's work on the Garment Workers' cultural life, cf.SALB vol.9 no.8,1984.
33. Interviews and documents in preperation for the drawing-up of principles for the Cultural LOcal,op.cit.
34. A.Sitas;"Culture and Production"...op.cit.
35. see A.Sitas, Black Worker Responses on the East Rand to Changes in the Metal Industry, Phd thesis, Witwatersrand University,1984.
36. B.Anderson, IMAGINED COMMUNITIES: REFLECTIONS ON THE ORIGINS AND SPREAD OF NATIONALISM,London,1984,p.16
37. ibid
38. On early ANC history see for instance T. Walshe, THE RISE OF AFRICAN NATIONALISM IN SOUTH AFRICA,London,1970
39. see T.Lodge's, BLACK POLITICS IN SOUTH AFRICA, Johannesburg,1982, see especially, introduction and chapter 1.
40. See J.Cronin and R.Suttner, 30 YEARS OF THE FREEDOM CHARTER,Johannesburg,1986.Also,H.J. & R.E. Simons' CLASS AND COLOUR IN SOUTH AFRICA,1850-1950,Harmondsworth,1969. Note though that the process of radicalisation was much slower in Natal than the rest of the country.
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42. S.Marks'RELUCTANT REBELLION,Oxford,1970 offers still one of the most convincing outlines of the socio-political implications of segregation and reserve-carving in Natal.
43. N.Alexander,SOW THE WIND:CONTEMPORARY SPEECHES, Johannesburg,1985,p.44.
44. G.Mare',"Inkatha: What COntent to Populism?", African Studies Seminar Paper, Pietermaritzburg,1984.
45. G.Mare, IBID.
46. cf.L.Althusser,"Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" in LENIN AND PHILOSOPHY,London,1971.
47. S.Marks The Ambiguities of Dependence: Class, Nationalism and the State in Twentieth Century Natal, Johannesburg,1986
48. ibid,p9-10
49. ibid,p.111-12
50. P.Hudson, "Some Problems and Advances in the Theory of Class Struggle", ASSA Conference Paper,1984,charts-out a different critical project based on Laclau's shorthcomings.His subsequent work has shifted away from the considerations I outline here and a critical interchange is out of place here.
51. E.Laclau,POLITICS AND IDEOLOGY IN MARXISTR THEORY, London,1977.

52. ibid p.99
53. ibid
54. ibid,p.100
55. ibid,p.101
56. ibid,p.105
57. I conflate here dominant with hegemonic ideologies which need to be separated if we are discussing competing political projects.E.g.Inkatha might provide the dominant interpellations in Kwazulu through institutions it controls,but, this cannot be assumed to be an index of its hegemony.
58. See A.Sitas, Phd thesis op cit.Chapter 1.
59. R.Davies et al,op cit,p.3
60. See for instance the work of P.Hudson op cit, G.Mare,op cit, but also,M.Swilling's East Rand and East London work.
61. This critique was initiated by N.Mouzelis in New Left Review,1979.
62. B.Anderson, op cit, pp.104ff.
63. IBID
64. T.Couzens,THE NEW AFRICAN: A STUDY OF THE LIFE AND WORK OF H.I.E DHLOMO, Johannesburg 1985,p.241ff. See also,H.I.E.Dhlomo, COLLECTED WORKS,edited by N.Visser and T.Couzens,Johannesburg,1985.
65. J.Cronin "Review of 'Xhosa Oral Poetry' in SOCIAL DYNAMICS VOL. 11 NO.2 1985,P.91
66. V.Turner,"Myth and Symbol" in the INTERNATIONAL ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SOCIAL SCIENCE, vol.10,New York,1968,p.576; despite the subjective emphasis of myth transmission that Turner's account generates, it is remarkably close to Levi-Strauss' more structuralist/binary one: cf,E.Leach,"Levi-Strauss in the Garden of Eden: an Examination of Some recent Developments in the analysis of myth", New York Academy of Sciences, Division of Anthropology, 1961,pp386-396.
67. M.Godelier The Origins of Myth, NEW LEFT REVIEW,1983
68. CF J.Larrain, THE CONCEPT OF IDEOLOGY,Londonn,1979,see his discussion of structuralism.
69. see the interesting collection of essays in Claassesn and Skanlik (eds) THE EARLY STATE, Amsterdam,1978
70. see above Davies R. et al, p.4
71. see G.Mare's discussion op cit, of the main features of Inkatha's populism
72. ibid
73 A.Sitas ,see Phd Thesis, op cit.
74. There are many oral interviews capturing this experience in the Department's, Worker Resistance in Natal Project,and, Culture and Working Life Project.
75. The work
76 Most of this is from D.Bonnin's work,interviews and surveys;for a sample cf. "From Labour: Tenant to Industrial Worker:the Case of the Sarmcol Strikers",paper submitted as evidence in the MAWU Vs BTR/SARMCOL industrial court case,1986.Also, from conversations during and after the construction of the Sarmcol Workers' play:the Long March.Also, "Inos Mbelu: from Labour Tenancy to Wage Labour in Natal" edited by J.Woodhouse and A.Sitas,University of Natal,Durban,1985/6.

77. On Ingavuma's political economy see the work of Derman and Poultney"The Pongola Floodplains of Northern Natal",mimeo,1986. On Richards' Bay see M.Bryerly's Honours thesis "The Richards' Bay Bus Boycotts",University of Natal,1985.Also H.L.Watts (ed) A SOCIO-ECONOMIC BASELINE REGIONAL SURVEY IN THE RICHARDS BAY AND EMPANGENI REGION,Durban,1985. Also interviews: Ntombela; Vilane;
78 See I.Edwards' "Living on the smell of an Oil-Rag- Life' in Cato Manor Farm in the 1940s",History Workshop Paper, University of Natal,1983. Also, "Swing the Assegai Peacefully? 'New Africa',Mkumbane, the CoopperaTIVE mOVEMENT AND ATTEMPTS TO TRANSFORM dURBAN sOCIETY IN THE 1940S",MIMEO,1987.Also G.Maarsdorp and A.B.Humphreys, FROM SHANTYTOWN TO TOWNSHIP:AN ECONOMIC STUDY OF AFRICAN POVERTY AND REHOUSING IN A SOUTH AFRICAN CITY,Johannesburg,1975.
79. Interviews op.cit.
80. see JC Rounds Religious Change and social Change in South Africa,Phd Thesis, New York,1979.